BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC STATS Infoline

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highlights

a weekly digest of recently released British Columbia statistics

The Economy

- **The cost of new housing in British Columbia continued to slide in February.** The New Housing Price Index (NHPI), which measures changes in prices charged by contractors for new homes, fell 6.5% in Victoria (relative to February 1998) and 5.5% in Vancouver. New house prices in both cities have fallen in every month since mid-1994. Canadian new house prices were 0.5% higher this February than a year earlier. Calgary's housing market continued to boom, with new house prices rising 5.6%, more than in any other city. Regina (+3.4%) and Halifax (+3.0%) also saw relatively strong increases.
  Source: Statistics Canada

- **Department store sales in British Columbia and the two territories rose 1.3% in February, relative to the same month last year.** The increase in sales was below the national average (+4.3%). Sales were up in all provinces except Quebec (-1.4%), with increases ranging from 1.3% in BC to 10.9% in Saskatchewan. The three prairie provinces led the country, with both Manitoba (+8.2%) and Alberta (+7.1%) recording significant sales growth. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Motor vehicle sales in British Columbia increased 8.8% in February, compared to the same month last year.** This was above the national average (+4.7%). Newfoundland (+19.8%), Ontario (+9.6%) and New Brunswick (+9.2%) were the only provinces where sales improved more than in BC. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Median Income

- **The median before-tax income of families and unattached individuals in the province increased slightly (+1.0%, after adjusting for inflation), to $37,957, in 1997**. This was the first time since 1994 that median incomes in the province have risen more than the overall price level. During the 1980s–a period when there was significant price inflation–incomes did not increase at a fast enough rate to keep pace with changes in the overall price level. As a result, there has been some erosion in real incomes since 1980. In BC, the real median income of families and individuals has fallen by $6,750 since 1980–1.7 times the decline ($4,000) at the national level. *Source: Statistics Canada & BC STATS*

- **Nationally, the median before-tax income of families and unattached individuals declined for the third straight year, falling 0.8% to $37,979–only marginally higher than in BC ($37,957).** Since the beginning of the decade, real median incomes in the province have remained within +/-2% of the national level in every year except 1990. Ontario ($42,753) and Alberta ($40,403) were the only provinces where the median income was higher than Canada's in 1997. BC was ranked third, with median incomes in other provinces ranging from $31,125 in Newfoundland to $36,872 in Manitoba.
  Source: SC, Catalogue 13-207-XPE

Low Income

- **The number of British Columbians with incomes below the Low Income Cutoff (LICO) increased by 22,000 in 1997, rising to 706,000.** These individuals represented almost a fifth (18.2%) of the total population.

  The incidence of low income in British Columbia has risen in all but two years since 1990, when an estimated 14.8% of individuals in BC had incomes below the LICO. This follows a national trend, which has seen the incidence of low income increase from 15.4% to 17.5% during the 1990s. Saskatchewan (where the incidence of

Did you know...
If hamburger lovers could purchase a big Mac using the world's newest currency–the Euro–they'd have to fork over the equivalent of $2.71 US. That's 73 cents more than it would cost in Canada. Those who relish Big Macs spend the least when they're in Malaysia ($1.19 US) and the most ($3.97 US) when they're in Switzerland.

low income fell from 17.8% to 15.8% between 1990 and 1997) and Alberta (from 16.8% to 15.7%) were the only provinces to buck this trend.

Living below the LICO does not mean that an individual or family is living in poverty; it simply means that they are spending a disproportionately large share of their income on the basic necessities of life–food, clothing and shelter.

Source: SC, Catalogue 13-569-XPB

- **Nationally, 17.5% of Canadians lived below the LICO in 1997.** Quebec (20.4%) continued to have the highest incidence of low income in the country. Newfoundland (19.8%), Manitoba (19.4%) and BC (18.2%) were the only other regions where the incidence of low income was above the national average. PEI (13.4%) had the lowest incidence of low income in the country.

  Source: SC, Catalogue 13-569-XPB

- **In BC, women (19.0%) were more likely than men (17.2%) to experience low income.** The incidence of low income was also higher than average among the elderly (19.8% for those 65 and over). This was especially true for elderly women, where one in four (25.3%) lived below the LICO. Elderly men fared much better; only 13.0% had low incomes. Children (aged 17 and under) living in two-parent families (13.5%) were at relatively low risk of experiencing low income. However, more than half (52.3%) of those living with a single mom were in a low income situation. *Source: SC, Catalogue 13-569-XPB*

Tourism

- **Visitor entries to British Columbia from the US and overseas were 15.2% higher in February than in the same month last year.** For the first time since early 1997, the increase in entries was due to strong growth in the number of visitors coming from both US (+15.2%) and overseas (+15.1%) sources. Asian entries ended a 14-month long decline, increasing 11.1% in February. Visitor entries from Europe (+19.4%) and other parts of the world (+22.0%) also increased at double-digit rates.

  Source: Statistics Canada

- **Eighty-six percent of foreign visitors who entered Canada via BC came from the US.** Half (199,600) of them stayed in Canada for at least one night. During the six-month period ending in February, the number of overnight entries from the US has increased at rates ranging from 11.9% to 28.4%. In February, overnight visits from the US were up 24.9%, marking the second consecutive month in which they have increased by a quarter or more.

  Source: Statistics Canada

Traffic Collisions

- **During 1997, 47,472 motor vehicle collisions were reported to the police in British Columbia.** More than half (26,084) of these collisions involved property damage only. In 21,049, there were injuries, and less than one percent (339) resulted in fatalities. In total, 389 people died in traffic accidents in the province, and another 31,501 were injured during 1997. Fatal collisions were most likely to occur between 10 and 11 pm, and one in four happened on a Saturday.

  Source: Traffic Collision Statistics, Motor Vehicle Branch

The Nation

- **Canada's national debt stood at $568.9 billion at the end of February.** This compares to $579.7 billion at the end of the 1997/98 fiscal year. The federal government posted a modest surplus ($0.3 billion) in February. For the first eleven months of the fiscal year, the surplus was $10.8 billion. This was $782 million less than at the same time last year. Federal government revenues were up 1.9% (+$2.7 billion), but program expenditures increased 3.3% (+$3.0 billion). Offsetting the increase in program expenditures was a 6.8% decline (-$0.8 billion) in public debt interest charges. Twenty-nine cents of every dollar spent by the federal government goes to pay interest costs on the national debt.

  Source: Federal Department of Finance, Fiscal Monitor

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For data originating from Statistics Canada: data sourced to 'Statistics Canada' has been retrieved from CANSIM, the agency's electronic database; otherwise the source is identified as 'SC' plus the publication name or catalogue number.

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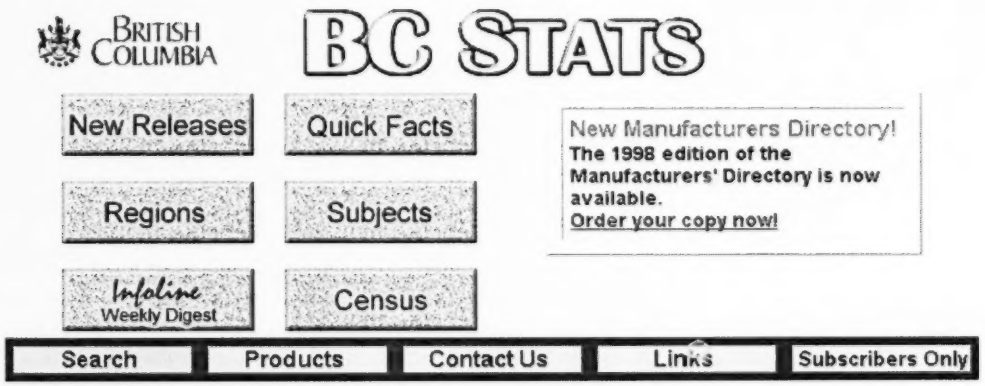

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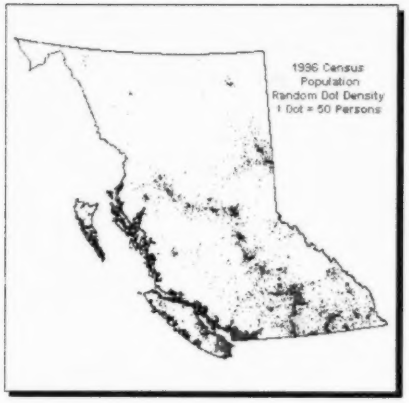

Regions

Development Regions(8)

Regional Districts (28)

Municipalities (152)

Local Health Areas (102)

Provincial Electoral Districts (75)

Regional District Electoral Areas (164)

Subject Areas

Business

- High Technology
- Small Business
- Tourism

Economics

- Asia Pacific Issues
- BC Economic Accounts
- Exports & Imports

General Information

- Census
- Financial & Economic Review
- Geography & Maps
- How to Research a Business Plan
- Infoline (Weekly Digest)
- Quick Facts About BC

Data Services

- Custom Data Requests (priced)
- Standard Data Products (free)

Labour

- Employment & Earnings (SLFH)
- Labour Force (LFS)

Demographics

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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Jan 1/99	% change on one year ago
BC	4,021.4	0.7
Canada	30,418.1	0.9
GDP and INCOME		% change on
(BC - at market prices)	1997	one year ago
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *($ millions)*	109,347	3.3
GDP *($ 1992 millions)*	98,201	2.2
GDP *($ 1992 per Capita)*	24,775	0.1
Personal Disposable Income *($ 1992 per Capita)*	16,340	-2.3
TRADE ($ millions)		
Manufacturing Shipments (seas. adj.) Jan	2,912	7.0
Merchandise Exports (raw) Jan	2,098	11.9
Retail Sales (seasonally adjusted) Jan	2,773	-2.6
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		% change on
(all items - 1992=100)	Feb '99	one year ago
BC	110.1	0.5
Canada	109.1	0.7
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		% change on
(seasonally adjusted)	Mar '99	one year ago
Labour Force - BC	2,094	2.5
Employed - BC	1,918	4.1
Unemployed - BC	176	-12.8
		Mar '98
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	8.4	9.9
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	7.8	8.4
INTEREST RATES (percent)	Apr 14/99	Apr 15/98
Prime Business Rate	6.50	6.50
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	6.20	6.30
- 5 year	6.70	6.75
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	Apr 14/99	Apr 15/98
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $	1.4929	1.4393
US $ *(reciprocal of the closing rate)*	0.6695	0.6951
AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS		% change on
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	Jan '99	one year ago
BC	615.81	1.0
Canada	604.55	-0.1

SOURCES:

Population, Gross Domestic Product, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Earnings } Statistics Canada

Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics

For latest Weekly Financial Statistics see www.bank-banque-canada.ca/english/wfsgen.htm

Released this week by BC STATS

- Labour Force Statistics, March 1999

Next week

- Small Business Quarterly, 4th Quarter 1998
- Earnings and Employment Trends, January '99

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